

Superior Court for the State of Washington
for the County of King
Interpreter Services Department

516 Third Ave. C-913
Seattle, WA 98104

(206) 296-9358

April 2, 1996

Dear Fellow Interpreter,

Recently, an incident occurred in King County Superior Court which has prompted this letter. We hope this serves as a reminder about the extra care we all need to take to maintain our appearance of objectivity.

A defendant engaged his trial interpreter in conversation during a recess when the defense attorney was not present at counsel table. The defendant asked the interpreter several questions and told the interpreter about his and the co-defendant's involvement in the case. Without going into more detail, the results of this were: (1) The Judge considered declaring a mistrial, (2) The interpreter was almost called as a witness in the case, (3) The interpreter was replaced for the rest of the trial, (4) The attorney stated emphatically **on the record** that no interpreter was to have any conversation with his client without the attorney present and (5) Called into question were the interpreter's credibility as well as the credibility of the interpretation services in Superior Court overall.

Although the interpreter had nothing but the best of intentions during this situation, this conversation had repercussions well beyond the short exchange.

It has been the policy of King County Superior Court that no interpreter shall participate in any conversation with a defendant or litigant outside the presence or direction of that person's attorney. If the person has no attorney, all questions and comments should be directed and interpreted to the Judge. As interpreters, we are not to offer any advice or involve ourselves in the litigant's case, his/her personal business, other cases the litigant might have in other courts or in any other way that could compromise our neutrality. Even an innocent conversation can have a negative effect.

A revised policy will be forthcoming that should be a further clarifying guideline for all of us. Meanwhile, should you find yourself in a similar situation, some suggestions for dealing with a talkative litigant are to courteously but firmly tell the person to wait for the attorney to return or simply to remove yourself from earshot of the litigant. **Do not get involved in any casual conversation with the person for whom you are interpreting.** The appearance of your neutrality is compromised.

On a different note, we would also like to remind you of the procedure to follow when a hearing or appointment is cancelled for whatever reason. Please return your voucher to our office so that we can detail and verify on the voucher the circumstances of the cancellation. The payment coordinator will not authorize payment for cancelled appointments or hearings without an explanation from our office.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call us at 296-9358 or come by the office, C-913, King County Courthouse.

Sincerely,

Martha N. Cohen

Martha N. Cohen

Susana Stettri Sawrey

Susana Stettri Sawrey